



U.S. COAST GUARD



Homeland Security

Flag Voice 272

Quick Links

[Human Resources Home](#)
[Be a Part of the Coast Guard:](#)

- »»Military Careers
- »»Civilian Opportunities
- »»Learn about the Reserve
- »»Coast Guard Academy

[Flag Voice](#)
[»»Biography of the Assistant Commandant for Human Resources](#)
[Future Force](#)
[Contact Us](#)

INFORMATION ON PANDEMIC INFLUENZA AND AVIAN INFLUENZA

Recently, there has been a tremendous amount of media reporting on Avian influenza. Avian influenza is a disease of birds and has not been shown to spread from person-to-person. Thus far, the Avian Flu virus of concern, H5N1, is only known to have spread to humans who have had direct contact with sick birds or their excrement. The major concern is that this virus, which has a very high mortality rate in those humans who have contracted it through birds, could mutate into a virus that could easily spread from person to person. If this happens, it is possible that it could cause what is known as a pandemic. Pandemic influenza outbreaks occur when a new influenza virus infects humans worldwide at higher than usual rates, causing serious disease. Even though it has been 36 years since the last pandemic, experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) agree that a pandemic influenza outbreak could occur if this Avian influenza virus mutates.

Other Links

[Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\)](#)
[Department of Transportation \(DOT\)](#)
[Coast Guard Retirees](#)
[Coast Guard News and Information](#)
[Military Locator](#)

In conjunction with DHS and DoD, the Coast Guard has been actively involved with the Avian Flu issue for more than a year. Below are examples of some of the work that is being done:

- Participation in the DHS Avian Influenza Task Force that is developing a DHS response plan.
- Participation in the DoD Joint Preventive Medicine Policy Group (JPMPG) that assists in the DoD Avian influenza and pandemic influenza response plans.
- Creation of the Coast Guard Contagious Disease Response Working Group that coordinates response plans from different Headquarters Directorates in Operations, Marine Safety, and Health and Safety. This group is working on revising Operational Quick Response Cards and Commandant Instructions/Manuals relating to influenza response.
- Participation in the DoD Febrile Respiratory Illness surveillance program which provides active surveillance of influenza-like illnesses in Coast Guard training programs.

The Coast Guard is considered a Tier I agency within the DoD framework and will be provided enough vaccine and/or anti-viral medication for our entire military workforce in the event it is needed. The effectiveness of existing medication against Avian Flu is unknown because no one knows whether or how the Avian Flu virus will mutate. One particular anti-viral medication, Tamiflu, has been shown to be an effective treatment for many forms of influenza. DoD has ordered considerable quantities of Tamiflu for protection against any potential influenza outbreak. Additionally, clinical trials have produced a vaccine that is somewhat effective against the current form of H5N1, but it may or may not provide protection against a mutated version.

Coast Guard members who are located in regions where Avian Flu bird-to-human transmission has occurred and those Coast Guard members who may have limited contact with poultry or contaminated surfaces, are at low risk for Avian Flu exposure. Thus far, the CDC has not recommended use of personal protective equipment (PPE) (such as N95 respirators, gloves) for those considered to be at low risk. However, if a Coast Guard member believes exposure to a serious contagious disease is at moderate or high risk, the following procedures should be followed:

- Take immediate steps to involve the appropriate medical officer to evaluate risk and apply risk management.
- Don disposable gloves made of lightweight latex, nitrile or vinyl. Remove gloves promptly after use.
- Wear protective clothing, preferably disposable outer garments, and wear disposable protective shoe covers or rubber or polyurethane boots that can be cleaned and disinfected after use.
- Wear safety goggles to protect the mucous membranes of eyes.
- Use disposable particulate respirators (such as N-95,). Coast Guard members must be fit-tested on an annual basis and know how to check the face-piece to face seal.
- Discard all disposable PPE and disinfect all non-disposable PPE.
- Utilize hand hygiene measures after removal of PPE.
- Contact the CDC Division of Global Migration and Quarantine duty officer - (404) 498-1600 and cognizant MLC(k) and Coast Guard Headquarters, Operational Medicine and Medical Readiness (CG-1121).

All Coast Guard members should take the following preventive measures to guard against potential infection with any influenza virus or other contagious, febrile respiratory illness:

- Get your annual flu shot.
- Stay at home if you are sick (this must be emphasized to our active duty personnel...carrying your illness into work and exposing your shipmates is not in the best interests of the Coast Guard).
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Clean your hands often with soap and warm water or alcohol-based gels to protect yourself from germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth because germs are often spread when you touch something that is contaminated and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Contact a health care provider if you develop flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches) even if you had a flu shot. Before visiting a health-care setting, inform the health care provider about symptoms and recent possible exposures. (This will allow the clinic or sick bay to provide an alternate setting for the ill person to wait rather than expose others in the clinic to a contagious illness).

As we learn more about pandemic influenza and avian influenza (H5N1), we will provide more information to the field. We will work directly and through the MLCs to schedule timely dissemination of relevant information. If you have any questions, please contact LCDR Erica Schwartz on my staff (CG-1121). She can be reached at (202) 267-0845 or by e-mail using the global address list.

Some sources of additional information include:

CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/gen-info/pandemics.htm>

WHO: http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/

Regards,

RADM Kenneth T. Venuto
Ken Venuto

This page is maintained by [Coast Guard Human Resources](#)



[Coast Guard Home Page](#)

[Customer Accessibility](#)

[Disclaimer](#)

[Questions/comments about US Coast Guard](#)

Last modified: undefined NaN, NaN